Python Introduction to Plotting

Main Points

- 1. A little background information
- 2. Create values for plotting
- 3. What exactly is a plot?
- 4. Create simple x, y-plots
- 5. Make plots look more stylish
- 6. Add titles and other information
- 7. Plot more than one set of values
- 8. Check out some specialty plots
- 9. How about some examples?

1 Background

Plots are very helpful for presenting the results of many engineering calculations. Plotting with *Python* and the *Matplotlib* library is fairly easy to do. The *Matplotlib* (https://matplotlib.org) library can create many types of publication quality plots. *Matplotlib's* pyplot module was created to make *MATLAB* type plots in *Python*.

- Plotting commands can be used from...
 - REPL (command line)
 - Scripts and functions
 - o Jupyter notebooks
- Sequences of numeric values are required to create plots
 - o Lists
 - Tuples
 - Ranges
 - o NumPy arrays
- Sequence data can be collected from an external source or created using math
- The simplest plot can be created using two lists (x and y) and issuing just a few commands
- Matplotlib provides many possible ways to modify and add to the plot, they include. . .
 - Setting axes limits
 - Adding a title and axes labels
 - o Turning on a grid
 - Setting line types, colors and widths
 - Setting marker shapes and sizes
 - Adding legends
- Axes may be linear or log10 or a combination of the two

- Specialty plots can be created, such as...
 - o Polar plots
 - o Histograms
 - Bar charts
 - Pie charts
 - Stairs plots
 - Stem plots
- Plots may be combined into the same plot window or multiple windows can be used

Approaches for Using Matplotlib and the pyplot module

- 1. State-machine approach based on the commands used in MATLAB to create plots
- 2. Object-oriented approach
 - Considered the more *Pythonic* approach because it is more explicit
 - The approach used in this document
 - Generally requires a bit more coding, but not a lot
 - Some results can only be achieved by using this approach
 - For many plotting tasks either approach will work

2 Creating Lists of Values for Plotting

The easiest way to create values for plots is to use *NumPy* array (presented at another time). However, *Python* can be used to do the same thing with just a little extra work. This section describes how to prepare lists of values for plotting by creating a pair of special-built functions and list comprehensions.

2.1 Ranges with Non-integer Values

The range() function only works with integer values for the starting, ending, and step size values and will only contain integers. When plotting it is often desirable to have a list with a non-integer values. The following sub-sections demonstrate the creation of two functions that can be used instead of the standard range() function. One creates a list with a specified number of values and the other a list with a specified non-integer step size.

2.1.1 Specified Number of Values - frange()

Presented below is a mathematical expression for creating a list of equally spaced values between upper and lower limits.

$$x_i = (x_{upper} - x_{lower}) \frac{i}{(n-1)} + x_{lower}$$

Where...

- i is the index position of a zero indexed list
- $\bullet \ x_{lower}$ and x_{upper} are the desired lower and upper limits
- \bullet n is the desired number of values in the list

A function named frange(lower, upper, n=100) (short for floating point range) that uses the above expression has been created in the following code block. The function uses a list comprehension to to create the list that the function returns.

- Returns a list containing n floating point values
- Between limits of lower and upper (including both limits)
- Last argument n=100 is a keyword argument
 - Argument is optional
 - o Default n will be 100 if argument is not used
 - o Include n= or not; i.e. n=100 and 100 both work

```
Creating and testing the frange() function

def frange(lower, upper, n=100):
    return [(upper - lower) * i/(n - 1) + lower for i in range(n)]

a = frange(-2, 3, 11)
    print(a)
    print(f"Length of list 'a' is {len(a)}")

[-2.0, -1.5, -1.0, -0.5, 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0]
    Length of list 'a' is 11
```

2.1.2 Specified Step Size - step_range()

The step_range(start, stop, step) function has been created to return a "range" of values with a non-integer step size. The function actually returns a list, not a true range. Lists created using step_range() will end with the nearest full step at or before the stop value. This means that stop value will only be included in the list if step divides evenly into stop - step. The function rounds the values in the list to 8-decimal places.

```
The step_range() function

def step_range(start, stop, step):
    n = int((stop - start) / step + 1)
    stop = (n - 1) * step + start
    x = [round((stop - start) * i/(n - 1) + start, 8) for i in range(n)]
    return x

x = step_range(0, 20, 2.5)
print(x)

[0.0, 2.5, 5.0, 7.5, 10.0, 12.5, 15.0, 17.5, 20.0]
```

2.2 Defining Functions and Using Them in List Comprehensions

Sequences of both x-values and y-values are usually needed for creating plots. Many times the x-values are used to calculate the y-values.

- Sequences of x-values could be created...
 - Manually as a list, tuple, or array
 - \circ With a standard range() command for integer values, i.e. x = range(10)
 - With a custom function like frange() or step_range()
 - With NumPy (covered separately)
- Use the sequence of x-values to create y-values
 - Standard Python
 - Define a function that returns a calculated value
 - Use a list comprehension that calls the function with the x-values
 - See the example code block below
 - Use NumPy array math

An Example

The following code block uses the previously created list named a and a list comprehension to create a list named b from the following expression:

```
b = 3.5^{(-0.5a)}\cos(6a)
```

3 Getting Started with Matplotlib

The ability to create plots is not built into the *Python* standard library. Plotting functionality is provided separately by the excellent *Matplotlib* library (among others). This document uses *Matplotlib's* pyplot module for all plotting operations.

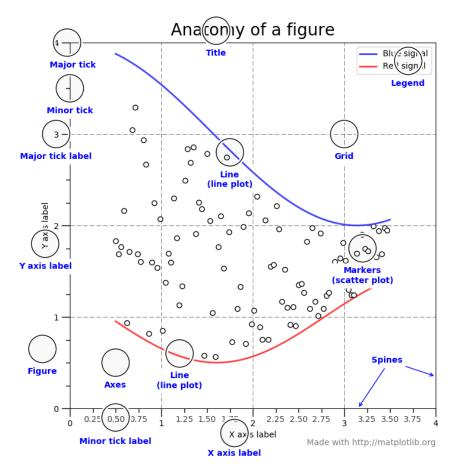
- pyplot must be imported before issuing any plotting commands; two common methods are. . .
 - o import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
 - o from matplotlib import pyplot as plt
- There are two fundamental approaches for creating plots using Matplotlib
 - o Object-oriented: more Pythonic and explicit
 - State-machine: more MATLAB-like and less explicit
- This document will exclusively use the object-oriented approach

```
Typical imports for plot creation

# usually either math or numpy, not both
import math
import numpy as np
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
```

Matplotlib uses specific names for the parts of a plot. The figure below comes from the Matplotlib website and illustrates the many different parts of a plot figure.

- The plot itself is referred to as an Axes
- Axes are located within a Figure
- Object-oriented approach gives fine control over both the figure and the axes added to it



4 Plotting Basics

One of the simplest possible plots is an x, y plot using sequences (i.e. lists) of x and y values. A figure and axes must be created before plotting when using the object-oriented approach. The following three methods could be used to plot x, y pairs with essentially the same results.

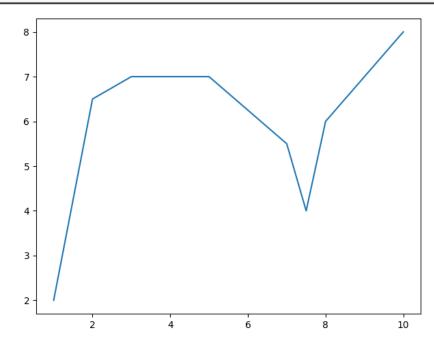
4.1 Method 1

- Create a blank figure (often named fig) using plt.figure()
- Add an axes object (often named ax) to the figure using fig.add_axes()
- Use list of location/size values as argument in fig.add_axes()
 - o [x-start, y-start, x-end, y-end]
 - Floats between 0 and 1 for each item
 - Values are relative to the lower, left corner of figure
 - x, y = (0, 0) is the lower, left corner
 - x, y = (1, 1) is the upper, right corner
 - o Example: [0, 0, 1, 1] fills the space from lower, left to upper, right of the figure
- Plot the values to the axes object using ax.plot(x, y)

```
Method 1 - using plt.figure() and .add_axes()

x = [1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 7.5, 8, 10]
y = [2, 6.5, 7, 7, 5.5, 4, 6, 8]

fig = plt.figure()
ax = fig.add_axes([0, 0, 1, 1])
ax.plot(x, y)
```

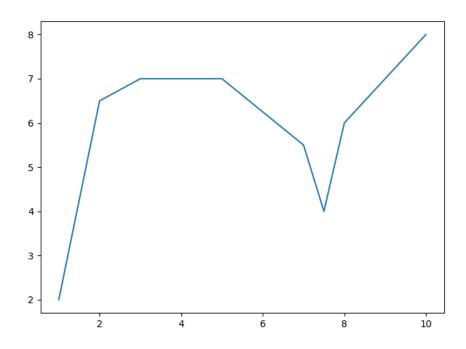


4.2 Method 2

- Create a blank figure (often named fig)
- Add a subplot object (often named ax) using fig.add_subplots()
- Subplot objects allow multiple axes (plots) to be arranged in different ways. . .
 - Next to each other
 - Above/below each other
 - o In a grid
- fig.add_suplots() accepts a 3-digit argument to set the axes arrangement
 - o First digit; number of axes high (rows)
 - Second digit; number of axes wide (columns)
 - o Third digit; the current axes for plotting
- Example, ax = fig.add_subplot(121) means...
 - o 1 plot (axes) high (1 row)
 - o 2 plots (axes) wide (2 columns)
 - The current plot (axes) is 1 (the top)
 - Subplot group assigned to the name ax
- Plot the values to the axes with ax.plot(x, y)

```
Method 2 - using plt.figure() and .add_subplot()

fig = plt.figure()
ax = fig.add_subplot(111)
ax.plot(x, y)
```

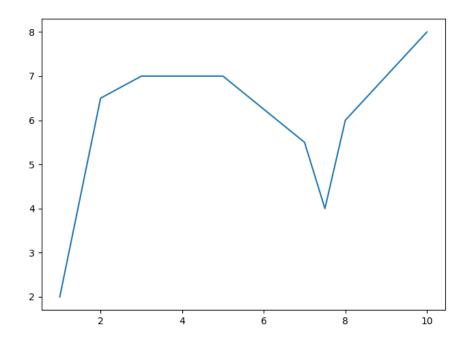


4.3 Method 3 – the preferred method

- Create a figure and axes at the same time by assigning plt.subplots() to a tuple with the figure and axes names
- Only be single axes will be created if no arguments are included in plt.subplots()
- May include a number of named arguments in plt.subplots() later
- Plot the values to the axes ax

```
Method 3 - using plt.subplots()

fig, ax = plt.subplots()
ax.plot(x, y)
```



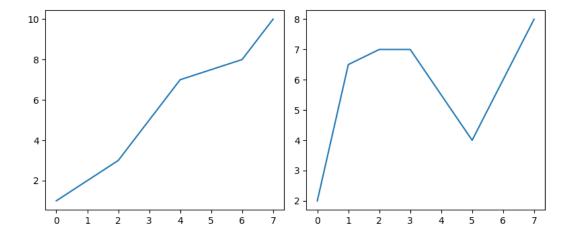
4.4 More Plotting Basics Information

- Variable names used in the plot() function do not need to be x and y
 - o Both must be sequences of the same size
 - First variable in the plot will be used to generate the x-values of each plotted point
 - Second variable will be used to generate the y-values of each plotted point
- It is possible to generate a plot with a single list; plot(x) or plot(y)
 - The list name used in plot() will correspond to the y-values of the plotted points
 - The x-value of the plotted points will match their index positions in the list
 - Plotting a single variable is not common for engineering problems

The following code block demonstrates what happens when only x or y is used in the plotting command. The example is using a subplot that is 1 row high by 2 columns wide in order to place the plots next to each other.

Plotting a single variable using a 2-column subplot

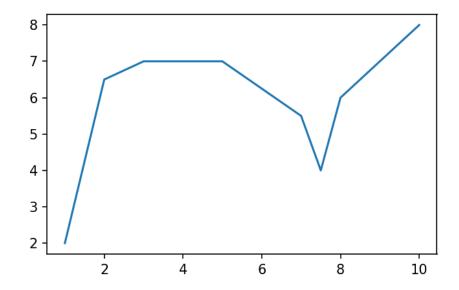
```
fig, (ax1, ax2) = plt.subplots(1, 2)
ax1.plot(x)
ax2.plot(y)
```



- The size of a figure can be set using keyword arguments in plt.subplots()
 - o figsize=(x, y) where x, y is the size in inches
 - o dpi=xxx where xxx is the pixel density in dots per inch

Setting figsize and dpi when using plt.subplots()

```
fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(4.5, 3), dpi=150)
ax.plot(x, y)
```



5 Formatting Arguments for .plot()

The .plot() method accepts a number of optional arguments that modify the look of a plot. The *Matplotlib* documentation includes a comprehensive list of the options.

- Quick line style, color, and marker changes
 - Place a formatting string immediately after the sequence names
 - Include values for any or all the options (style, color, and marker) in any order
 - The string '-r' will create a solid red line with no markers
 - The string '--bo' will create a dashed blue line with circle markers at each data point
 - Valid line types are. . .
 - Solid is -
 - Dashed is --
 - Dash-dot is -.
 - Dotted is :
 - o Valid colors include...
 - Red is r
 - Green is g
 - Blue is b
 - Cyan is c
 - Magenta is m
 - Yellow is y
 - Black is k
 - White is w
 - Valid marker shapes include any of the following, plus more
 - Point is .
 - × symbols are x and X
 - Plus signs are + and P
 - Circle is o = circle
 - Diamonds are d and D
 - Square is s
 - Triangles are ^, v, <, and >
 - Hexagons are h and H
 - Star is *
 - Pentagon is p
 - Octagon is 8
- Keyword arguments can be added after the formatting string (if used)
 - o linewidth=2.0 or lw=2.0 will make the plotted line 2-points wide
 - Line style can be changed using linestyle='--' or ls='--'
 - Use marker='*' to set the marker type
 - Use markersize=3 or ms=3 to set the marker size to 3
 - Colors can be changed using color='r' or c='r'
 - Using color or c allows for a much broader range of colors by typing color names as strings
- Use plt.show() after creating plots to keep from also showing a plot object descriptor

The code block below plots 100 values of (a,b) for a from -2 to 4 where b is calculated using the following expression. . .

$$b = 3.5^{(-0.5a)}\cos(6a)$$

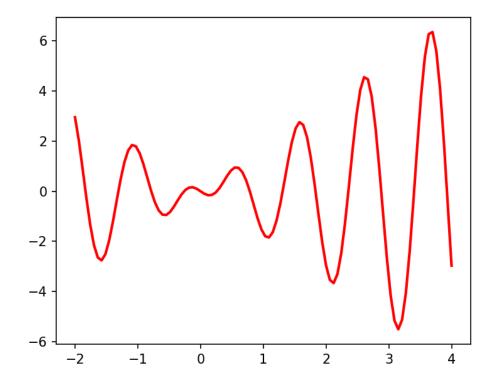
The plot is formatted with a solid red line that is 2.0 wide.

```
Plot with line color, style, and width settings

def frange(lower, upper, n=100):
    return [(upper - lower) * i/(n - 1) + lower for i in range(n)]

def bfunc(a):
    return 3.5*(-0.5*a) * math.cos(6*a)

a = frange(-2, 4)
b = [bfunc(a) for a in a]
fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(5, 4), dpi=150)
ax.plot(a, b, '-r', lw=2.0)
plt.show()
```



6 Adding a Title, Labels, and Other Stuff

It is quite easy to add a title, axes labels, and other options to plots. The Matplotlib Axes class lists all of the possible options. All code snippets below assume a figure named fig has a subplot object named ax. All formatting commands should be placed after the .plot() function and before plt.show().

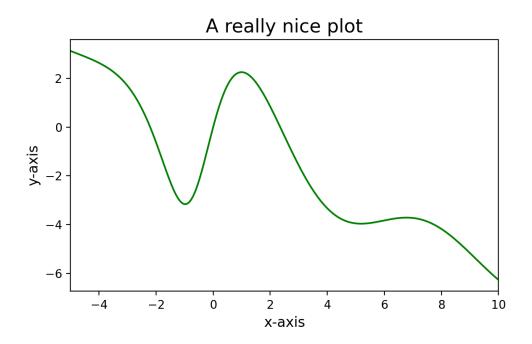
- Add titles and axis labels
 - Add a title using ax.set_title("Title Text")
 - Add axis labels with ax.set_xlabel("x") and ax.set_ylabel("y")
 - Set label/title text height in points by including the fontsize=x keyword argument
 - Use ax.set(title='Title', xlabel='x label', ylabel='y label') to set all three label strings at one time
- Set axis limits
 - Using ax.axis([xmin, xmax, ymin, ymax]) sets the plot limits in the x and y directions (requires that all 4 values be given, i.e. ax.axis([-2, 4, -7, 7]))
 - Use named arguments like ax.axis(xmin=0, xmax=10, ymin=-4, ymax=5) instead to change any or all axes limits
 - Use ax.set_xlim(xmin, xmax) or ax.set_ylim(ymin, ymax) to set limits for just one axis
- Add a grid by using ax.grid(True) or just ax.grid()

The example code block below uses NumPy instead of list comprehensions to create the sequences x and y for plotting the following expression with the listed options.

$$y = \frac{5 \sin x}{x + e^{-0.75 x}} - \frac{3 x}{5}$$
 over the range $-5 \le x \le 10$ with 200 values

- Green plot line that is 1.5 wide
- The title "A really nice plot" " with a fontsize of 16
- The x-axis label "x-axis" with a fontsize of 12
- The y-axis label "y-axis" with a fontsize of 12
- Plot limits of -5 and 10 for the x-axis

Plot with line color, style, and width settings x = np.linspace(-5, 10, 200) y = 5*np.sin(x)/(x + np.exp(-0.75*x)) - 3*x/5 fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(6, 4), dpi=200) ax.plot(x, y, '-g', lw=1.5) ax.set_title('A really nice plot', fontsize=16) ax.set_xlabel('x-axis', fontsize=12) ax.set_ylabel('y-axis', fontsize=12) ax.set_xlim(-5, 10) plt.show()



7 Multiple Plots

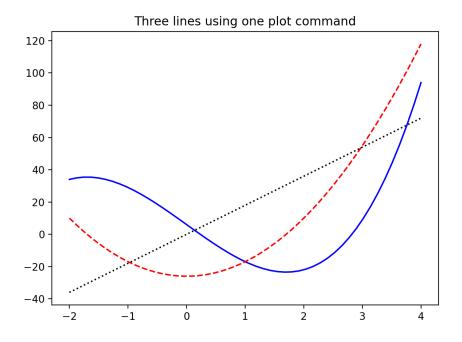
7.1 Multiple Plots on the Same Axes

To have more than one set of data in a single plot add more list pairs in the .plot() function. Color, line, and marker settings for each plot line should be placed after its pair of sequences. Another option is to create each plot separately using multiple ax.plot() commands; one for each set of data points then show them all. The later option is more flexible regarding formatting the lines. See the two following code blocks and plots for examples.

```
Three plots on in one axes using a single .plot() command

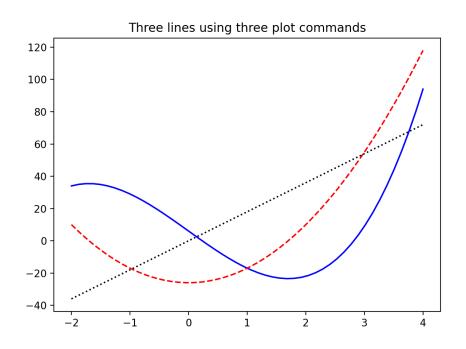
x = np.linspace(-2, 4)
y = 3*x**3 - 26*x + 6
yd = 9*x**2 - 26
ydd = 18*x

fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(6,4.5), dpi=200)
ax.plot(x, y, '-b', x, yd, '--r', x, ydd, ':k')
ax.set_title('Three lines using one plot command')
plt.show()
```



```
Three plots in one axes using a separate .plot() command for each line

fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(6,4.5), dpi=200)
ax.plot(x, y, '-b')
ax.plot(x, yd, '--r')
ax.plot(x, ydd, ':k')
ax.set_title('Three lines using three plot commands')
plt.show()
```



7.2 Multiple Plots on Separate Axes – Subplots

Multiple plots on separate axes are referred to as subplots.

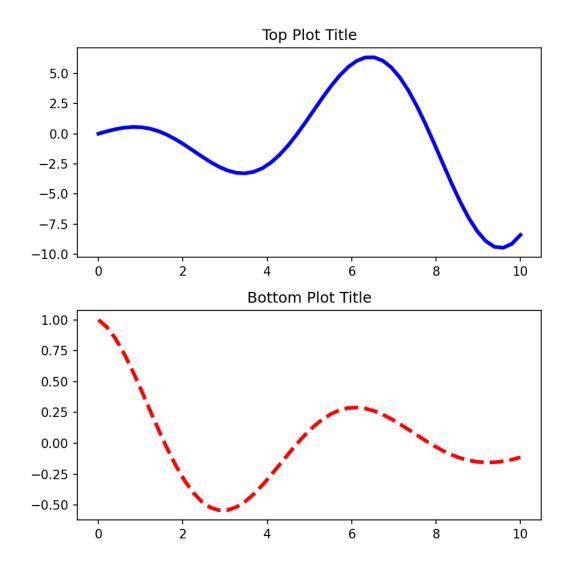
- The plt.subplots() method can be used to initialize a subplot with any number of rows or columns
 - Add the number of rows and columns desired inside the parentheses and separated by a comma
 - o plt.subplots(3, 1) will be 3 plots high by 1 plot wide (3 rows by 1 column)
 - Can also use the keyword arguments nrows=3 and ncols=1 instead
- If using fig.add_subplot() to create axes objects then the argument used needs to be a 3-digit value representing...
 - Number of rows
 - Number of columns
 - Which subplot is the active one
 - fig.add_subplot(211) yields a subplot object 2 rows high by 1 column wide with the first subplot active
- If more than one axes object is created, then a list of axes objects is returned

```
Creating a pair of stacked subplots

x = np.linspace(0, 10)
y1 = x*np.cos(x)
y2 = np.exp(-0.2*x)*np.cos(x)

fig, (ax1, ax2) = plt.subplots(2, 1, figsize=(6, 6), dpi=150)
ax1.plot(x, y1, 'b-', lw=3)
ax2.plot(x, y2, 'r--', lw=3)
ax1.set_title('Top Plot Title')
ax2.set_title('Bottom Plot Title')
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()
```

The line fig, (ax1, ax2) = plt.subplots(2, 1, ...) will assign the two subplot objects to the names ax1 and ax2 instead of to a single name for both. This way, plotting to the top (first) subplot uses ax1.plot() and plotting to the bottom (second) subplot uses ax2.plot(). An alternative would be to use a single name, such as ax, for pair of subplots. This method requires indexing to plot to each subplot; i.e. ax[0].plot() to plot to the top subplot. It is also a good idea to use $plt.tight_layout()$ just before plt.show() to automatically clean up the spacing between and around the subplots.



8 A Polar Plot and a Histogram

 ${\it Matplotlib}$ supports the construction of much more than just x,y plots. Two of the many other plot types are histograms and ploar plots.

8.1 Polar plot example

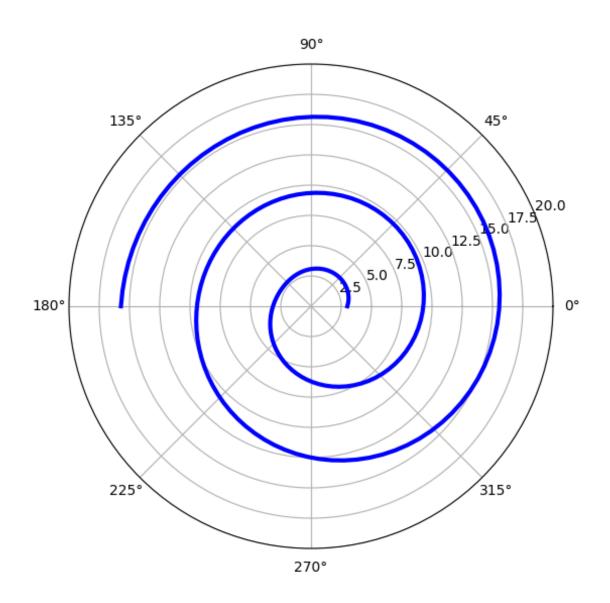
The following code block will create a polar plot. Notice that ax.plot() is still used in conjunction with plt.figure() and fig.add_axes().

- Add the polar=True keyword argument to fig.add_axes() after the list with the size information
- The two arguments in ax.plot() are...
 - First: angle (in radians)
 - o Second: radial value

A polar plot using fig.add_axes() with polar=True

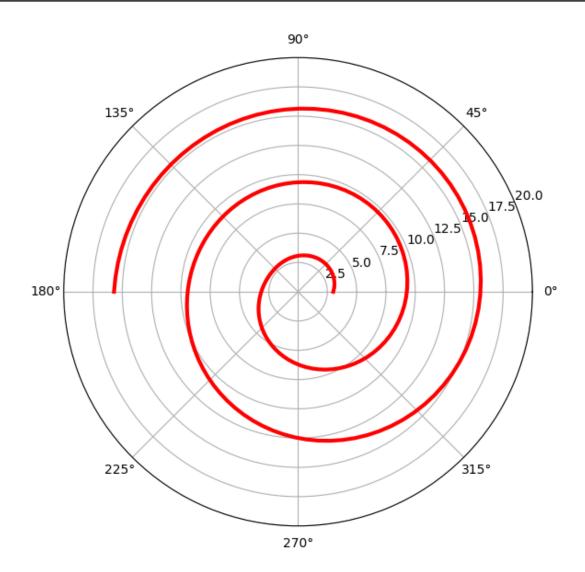
```
t = np.linspace(0, 5*math.pi, 200) # 200 points from 0 to 5pi radians
r = 3*np.cos(0.5*t)**2 + t

fig = plt.figure(figsize=(6, 6), dpi=100)
ax = fig.add_axes([0.1, 0.1, 0.8, 0.8], polar=True)
ax.plot(t, r, 'b', lw=3)
ax.set_ylim(0, 20) # ylim sets the radial limits for polar plots
plt.show()
```



8.2 Another polar plot example

Another option for polar plots is to use plt.subplots() to create the figure and add the keyword argument subplot_kw={'polar':True}.

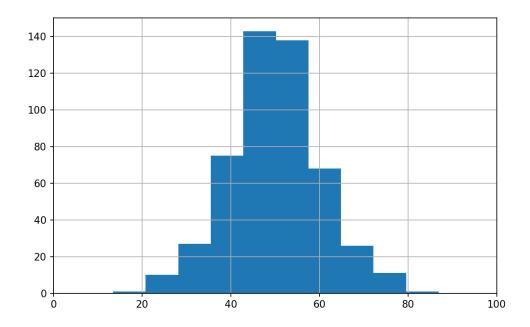


8.3 A histogram

Histograms are quite easy to make as well. The np.random.normal() function is used to create a list of random numbers that fit into a normal distribution. The ax.hist() function simply needs a list of values and the number of bins desired. Read about the command to see other options.

```
Histogram

mean = 50
std = 10
y = np.random.normal(mean, std, 500)
fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(8, 5), dpi=150)
ax.hist(y, 10)  # 10 bins (buckets)
ax.set_xlim(0, 100)
ax.grid(True)
plt.show()
```



9 More Examples

9.1 Vibration

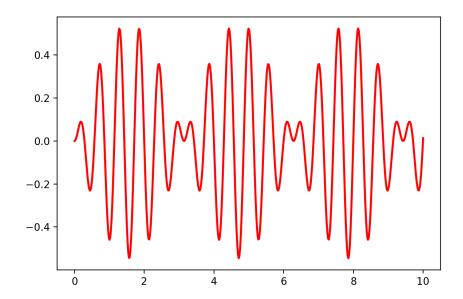
The following code block plots the following expression. . .

$$x(t) = \frac{2f_0}{\omega_n^2 - \omega^2} \sin\left((\omega_n - \omega)\frac{t}{2}\right) \sin\left((\omega_n + \omega)\frac{t}{2}\right)$$

for $0 \le t \le 10$ s with 500 values of t where $f_0 = 12 N/kg$, $\omega_n = 10 rad/s$, and $\omega = 12 rad/s$.

```
Vibration plot

t = np.linspace(0, 10, 500)
f_0 = 12
w_n = 10
w = 12
x = 2*f_0/(w_n**2 - w**2)*np.sin((w_n - w)*t/2)*np.sin((w_n + w)*t/2)
fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(6,4), dpi=200)
ax.plot(t, x, 'r', lw=2)
plt.show()
```

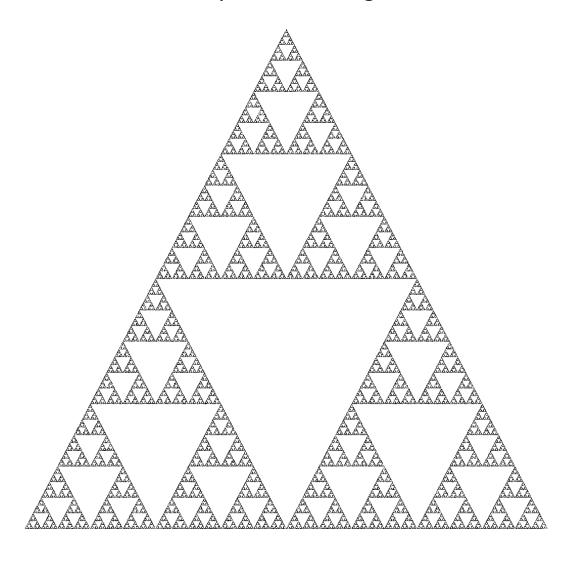


9.2 A Cool Math Plot

The following code cell uses if-elif-else statements and random values in a for loop to create the values for plotting **Sierpinski's Triangle** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierpinski_triangle

```
Sierpinski's Triangle
from random import randint
x = [0]
y = [0]
n = 200000
               # number of values to use
for k in range(1, n):
    choice = randint(0, 2)
    if choice == 0:
        x.append(0.5*x[-1])
        y.append(0.5*y[-1])
    elif choice == 1:
        x.append(0.5*x[-1] + 0.25)
        y.append(0.5*y[-1] + math.sqrt(3)/4)
    else:
        x.append(0.5*x[-1] + 0.5)
        y.append(0.5*y[-1])
fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(6,6), dpi=300)
ax.plot(x, y, 'k,')
ax.set_title("Sierpinski's Triangle", fontsize=16)
ax.axis('off')
plt.show()
```

Sierpinski's Triangle




```
...Batman
fig, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(8,6), dpi=120)
x1 = np.linspace(-8, 8, 200)
v1 = 4*np.sqrt(-(x1/8)**2 + 1)
y2 = -4*np.sqrt(-(x1/8)**2 + 1)
ax.fill_between(x1, y1, y2, color='gold')
ax.plot(x1, y1, c='black', lw=3)
ax.plot(x1, y2, c='black', lw=3)
x3 = np.linspace(-7, -3, 100)
y3 = 3*np.sqrt(-(x3/7)**2 + 1)
x4 = np.linspace(3, 7, 100)
y4 = 3*np.sqrt(-(x4/7)**2 + 1)
ax.fill_between(x3, y3, y2=0, color='black')
ax.fill between(x4, y4, y2=0, color='black')
x5 = np.linspace(-7, -4, 100)
y5 = -3*np.sqrt(-(x5/7)**2 + 1)
x6 = np.linspace(4, 7, 100)
y6 = -3*np.sqrt(-(x6/7)**2 + 1)
ax.fill_between(x5, y5, y2=0, color='black')
ax.fill between(x6, y6, y2=0, color='black')
x7 = np.linspace(-4, 4, 200)
y7 = (np.abs(x7/2) - (3*np.sqrt(33) - 7)/112*x7**2 +
      np.sqrt(1 - (np.abs(abs(x7) - 2) - 1)**2) - 3)
ax.fill between(x7, y7, y2=0, color='black')
x8 = np.linspace(-1, -0.75, 10)
x9 = np.linspace(0.75, 1, 10)
y8 = 9 - 8*np.abs(x8)
y9 = 9 - 8*np.abs(x9)
ax.fill_between(x8, y8, y2=0, color='black')
ax.fill_between(x9, y9, y2=0, color='black')
x10 = np.linspace(-0.75, -0.5, 10)
x10 = np.append(x10, np.linspace(0.5, 0.75, 10))
y10 = 0.75 + 3*np.abs(x10)
ax.fill between(x10, y10, y2=0, color='black')
```

